

21 C.J.S. Courts § 288

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Courts

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VIII. Concurrent and Conflicting Jurisdiction

B. State and United States Courts

3. Review of Judgments

b. Restrictions on Application of *Rooker-Feldman* Doctrine

§ 288. *Rooker-Feldman* limited to injury from court judgment

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West's Key Number Digest

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A federal court plaintiff is not subject to the *Rooker-Feldman* doctrine limiting the power of lower federal courts to review state court judgments and decisions unless the plaintiff has lost in state court and complains in federal court of injuries caused by the state-court judgment.

A federal court plaintiff is not subject to the *Rooker-Feldman* doctrine limiting the power of lower federal courts to review state court judgments and decisions unless the plaintiff has lost in state court¹ and complains in federal court of injuries caused by the state-court judgment.² The requirement that the federal plaintiff complain of an injury caused by a state judgment is the core requirement from which the others derive, and focusing on it helps clarify when the doctrine applies.³

The relevant inquiry is whether the state-court judgment caused, actually and proximately, the injury for which the federal-court plaintiff seeks redress in federal court, paying close attention to the relief sought in the federal suit.⁴

In some circumstances, federal suits purporting to complain of injury caused by an individual or third party in reality complain of injury caused by a state-court judgment.⁵ Nevertheless, the *Rooker-Feldman* doctrine did not preclude federal courts from considering a father's claims against a federal judge, a state family court judge, and state administrative employees for conspiring against him and violating his civil rights in connection with state child support proceedings; the father did not appeal the state court's child support decision but instead challenged the conduct of individuals who happened to participate in that decision.⁶ Under the *Rooker-Feldman* doctrine, if a plaintiff contends that out-of-court events have caused injury that the state judiciary failed to detect and repair, then a district court has jurisdiction to review the state court's decision but only to the extent of dealing with that injury.⁷

A federal suit complains of injury from a state-court judgment, even if it appears to complain only of a third party's actions, when the third party's actions are produced by the state-court judgment and not simply ratified, acquiesced in, or left unpunished by it.⁸

State agency decisions.

Because the *Rooker-Feldman* doctrine applies only where the federal court plaintiff lost in state court and complains of injuries caused by the state-court judgment, the doctrine does not apply to limit federal court review of state agency decisions, even in a case where the state supreme court ultimately holds that the agency's action or decision complies with state law, at least where no state court has rendered a decision in the case at the time when the plaintiff's suit is filed in federal court.⁹ However, a disciplinary determination issued by a state bar committee on professional conduct has been held to be the functional equivalent of a state court judgment, for purposes of the *Rooker-Feldman* doctrine, where the committee is created and appointed by the state supreme court, operates pursuant to rules promulgated by that court, and is subject to review by that court.¹⁰

CUMULATIVE SUPPLEMENT

Cases:

Action brought under § 1983 by persons charged with violating municipality's nuisance abatement law, alleging that municipality, mayor, and police department violated their constitutional rights

by coercing them into signing settlement agreements waiving various constitutional rights in order to avoid eviction from their businesses and residences, was not de facto appeal of state-court judgments, and therefore action was not barred by *Rooker-Feldman* doctrine, since complaint was about agreements themselves and conduct that led to them, regardless of enforceability of those agreements, and harm befell plaintiffs as soon as agreements were signed or state-court action was mere ratification and not cause of injuries. 42 U.S.C.A. § 1983; N.Y.C. Admin. Code §§ 7-701 et seq. *Sung Cho v. City of New York*, 910 F.3d 639 (2d Cir. 2018).

District court had jurisdiction over death row inmate's § 1983 claim alleging that decision of state board of pardons and paroles not to recommend commutation to the Governor violated the Equal Protection Clause, where challenge to clemency proceedings would not result in speedier release since, at most, proceedings could have resulted only in a stay until inmate was afforded a clemency proceeding commensurate with the Constitution, and such result would not have necessarily implied invalidity of conviction or sentence. U.S. Const. Amend. 14; 42 U.S.C.A. § 1983. *Young v. Gutierrez*, 895 F.3d 829 (5th Cir. 2018).

Rooker-Feldman doctrine did not apply to prevent federal District Court from hearing applicant's action against Office of the Mayor of the District of Columbia and District of Columbia Court of Appeals Admissions Committee challenging Committee's denial of his application to sit for the District's bar examination and rejection of his challenge to that denial; although applicant's action in District Superior Court arising from the same bar examination application denial had been dismissed, applicant was not asking the federal District Court to review and reject the Superior Court's dismissal, but rather challenging denial of application and handling of that denial process anew. *Jackson v. Office of the Mayor of District of Columbia*, 2018 WL 6816322 (D.C. Cir. 2018).

[END OF SUPPLEMENT]

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Footnotes

- 1 § 287.
- 2 U.S.—*Hoblock v. Albany County Bd. of Elections*, 422 F.3d 77 (2d Cir. 2005); *Coles v. Granville*, 448 F.3d 853 (6th Cir. 2006); *Campbell v. City of Spencer*, 682 F.3d 1278 (10th Cir. 2012).
- 3 U.S.—*Hoblock v. Albany County Bd. of Elections*, 422 F.3d 77 (2d Cir. 2005).
- 4 U.S.—*Teichmann v. New York*, 769 F.3d 821 (2d Cir. 2014); *Mo's Express, LLC v. Sopkin*, 441 F.3d 1229 (10th Cir. 2006).

5 U.S.—*Hoblock v. Albany County Bd. of Elections*, 422 F.3d 77 (2d Cir. 2005); *Johnson v. Pushpin Holdings, LLC*, 748 F.3d 769 (7th Cir. 2014); *Giles v. Phelan, Hallinan & Schmieg, L.L.P.*, 901 F. Supp. 2d 509 (D.N.J. 2012).

State-court custody order

Rooker-Feldman doctrine precluded federal court from reviewing question of whether court-appointed representative for child in parents' divorce proceeding violated husband's rights when she acted as child's advocate; only injury husband alleged that he suffered from representative's supposedly biased advocacy was the alienation of child's affections and a reduction in his custodial rights, which harms flowed directly from the fruit of representative's efforts: state-court custody orders favorable to wife.

U.S.—*Golden v. Helen Sigman & Associates, Ltd.*, 611 F.3d 356, 76 Fed. R. Serv. 3d 1420 (7th Cir. 2010).

6 U.S.—*Alexander v. Rosen*, 804 F.3d 1203 (6th Cir. 2015).

7 U.S.—*Iqbal v. Patel*, 780 F.3d 728 (7th Cir. 2015).

8 U.S.—*Hoblock v. Albany County Bd. of Elections*, 422 F.3d 77 (2d Cir. 2005).

9 U.S.—*Jicarilla Apache Nation v. Rio Arriba County*, 440 F.3d 1202 (10th Cir. 2006).

10 U.S.—*Mosby v. Ligon*, 418 F.3d 927 (8th Cir. 2005).

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